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SUBJECT: BENIN WRAP-UP MAY 17 - MAY 30, 2008

REF: (A) Cotonou 313 (B) Cotonou 306

1.(U) This cable is a bi-weekly summary of events which occurred in Benin between May 17 - 30. Comments for improvements from readers are welcome. Please direct them to Pol/Econ Officer Jason Hahn at hahnje@state.gov.

2.(U) Contents:

- President Yayi Announces 2008-2009 Cotton Prices
- Attempted Cocaine Seizure at the Port of Cotonou
- CENA Releases Municipal Elections Results
- MCC Funds Renewed Supervision of the Microfinance Sector
- PD Sponsors Seminar on Ethics in Journalism
- USAID receives 1.1 million doses of anti-malaria drug
- Ministry of Health to build Sector Wide Approach Plan

President Yayi Announces 2008-2009 Cotton Prices

3.(U) On May 25 President Yayi personally announced the prices farmers will be paid for their cotton harvest during the 2008-2009 cotton campaign. Farmers will receive FCFA 210 (USD 0.50) per kilogram for the highest quality cotton and 160 FCFA (USD 0.38) per kilogram for lesser quality cotton. Cotton accounts for 13 percent of Benin's GDP and 80 percent of its export income.

Attempted Cocaine Seizure at the Port of Cotonou

4.(SBU) On May 13, 2008, the Benin Intelligence Service (DSLDD) conducted a search of a warehouse at the Port of Cotonou for a suspected two tons of cocaine in response to information received from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in Lagos. The DSLDD did not find any cocaine during their search. The DEA suspects the cocaine was moved during the first week of May. For further reporting please see Cotonou 306.

CENA Releases Municipal Elections Results

5.(U) On May 20, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENA) published the results of the April 20 municipal and local elections after it failed to do so on May 6 (the date it previously promised). The results indicate that President Yayi's political coalition Force Cowry for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) has taken control of 36 communes out of 77, followed by the G13, a group led by 13 National Assembly deputies that split from President Yayi in February, with 9 communes. The 4 political parties referred to as the G4, the Renaissance of Benin (RB), the Party of Democratic Renewal (PRD), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the African Movement for Democracy and Progress (MADEP) maintained control over their individual strongholds. The results sparked protests in some parts of the country pending the Supreme Court's rulings regarding the numerous appeals filed by candidates who accused the CENA of

manipulating the vote. For further reporting please see Cotonou
1313.

MCC Funds Renewed Supervision of the Microfinance
Sector

6.(U) On May 27, the Charge d'Affairs participated in the signing of a \$1.5 million agreement between Millennium Challenge Account-Benin (MCA-Benin) and the Ministry of Finance. This agreement provides financial and technical support for the Ministry of Finance in its function as the supervisor of more than 700 microfinance institutions in Benin. Support will be provided this year and for three additional budget years. The Ministry agreed to rebuild the staffing of this function which had slipped from eighteen to five officers and to increase the number of financial institution inspections and follow up. The agreement established that MCA-Benin will continue to support the Ministry's micro-finance supervisory staff as long as progress is made in meeting a well-defined numerical set of ambitious targets.

PD Sponsors Seminar on Ethics in Journalism

7.(U) From May 19 through May 23, PD hosted a week-long journalism seminar titled: "Ethics in Journalism and the role of the media in an emerging democracy". Twenty-two reporters from 20 media outlets attended the seminar, including the state-controlled television and radio station, (ORTB) and the most prominent privately-owned television and radio station, Golfe TV/FM. The seminar covered the

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basics of journalistic ethics and the role of responsible media in a democracy. At the end of the seminar, the reporters congratulated the Embassy for hosting this seminar and promised to use the lessons in their work. The seminar received very good press coverage resulting in the publication of articles in several newspapers and the broadcast of news reports on all major Cotonou-based TV and radio stations with an estimated audience of 2.5 million.

USAID receives 1.1 million doses of anti-malaria drug

8.(U) Under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), USAID received a second stock of 1.1 million tablets of sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine (SP) which is used as malaria preventive treatment for pregnant women. Upon clearance from customs, the commodities will be transferred to the Ministry of Health supply system. The 1.1 million tablets complement a first stock of 1.2 million tablets delivered to the Ministry of Health in March 2008.

Ministry of Health to build Sector Wide Approach Plan

9.(U) The Ministry of Health is engaging in a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) mechanism that will involve all donors supporting the health sector. Under the approach, the Government of Benin expects all donors to put their funding in a common basket that will support its health strategy with a unique monitoring and evaluation system. USAID supports the Ministry's adoption of the SWAP but has not made a decision to put funding in such a mechanism to support its program.

BOUSTANI